Discussion Boards (DB) CHEAT SHEET FOR TEACHERS

Basics

Should you have a discussion board?
This depends on your circumstances. Think carefully of what you want to achieve (see next point) and decide for your own circumstances. They do require work to make them work well. If they work they provide a great way for your students to engage actively with their own learning.
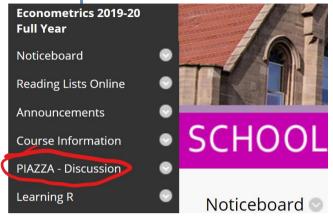
What is the purpose of your DB?
You may want to achieve different things with a discussion board. Here are a few purposes and not all of these are likely to be compatible with each other.
Create a Q&A with answers students can rely on. Encourage students to interact with each other. Encourage students to challenge themselves by asking and responding to challenging questions. Discuss peripheral issues to the core content. Provide feedback to student understanding.

Will I have to monitor my email and the DB for student questions now?
Advise students to pose ALL content questions to the DB. Only email with personal issues. In the first weeks you will get email queries. Don't answer them on email. Copy and paste the question into a DB post and answer it there. If you do this consistently you can eliminate all but personal messages from your email.

Setup

Econometrics 2019-20 Full Year

- Noticeboard
- Reading Lists Online
- Announcements
- Course Information
- PIAZZA - Discussion
- Learning R

SCHOOL

Noticeboard

Clearly link from the left hand main menu of BB.

What persona do you take on the DB?
It is very important that your students know what they can expect from you and your GTAs on the discussion board. The two extremes are "I try to answer all questions completely and as quickly as I can." and "I am merely monitoring that students behave appropriately but leave it to other students to answer your question." The trade-off between the two extremes is likely that you may get many questions but little student interaction in the former case and fewer questions but better interaction in the latter. You may well want to place yourself somewhere inbetween the extremes. It is important that you think about the purpose of your DB, on that basis decide on your persona and then stick to your rules.

Student Engagement

How do you get students to use the DB at the beginning of the course?
The first week is crucial. This will decide whether students will email you with questions or whether they will go to the DB. Seed the DB with typical questions and your answers. Replicate great questions you had after the lecture on the DB (or better ask students to do so). Give them reason to go there.

How much presence do you have to show?
You may have decided, as teaching staff, to stay more in the background rather than actively answer questions on the DB. That is fine if it is clear to students, but we do know from students that they value the DB more if they see the teaching staff also being present. So if you do not want to give answers you should consider at least commenting or approving questions and answers.

Praise incomplete, controversial and wrong answers – and use them
When a question is posed ensure that either the original poster or another student responds before you jump in (this is very difficult!).
Demand that students show their attempts at answering.
Acknowledge that being wrong is part of the learning process and establish a supportive environment.
Pick up on any misunderstandings on the DB by referring to them in other settings (lectures, classes).

Details matter

Should I allow anonymous posts?
Some students feel more comfortable to post anonymously. The price you may pay is that some students may post things which are not appropriate. These may be advertisements to parties (reply to the sender that this is not appropriate and delete the post), students disagreeing with educational decisions you make such as not publishing fully worked solutions to past exam papers (these are uncomfortable but you made your decision with a reason, give this reason and attempt to calm the discussion), or inappropriate personal messages (reply to the sender that this is not appropriate and delete the post). If need be you can switch off the anonymous posting option. Sometimes you may have to remind students to be polite to each other even if they disagree.

How do GTA's engage?
You should encourage to show a presence on the DB. You could give them a schedule of weeks when each should be present. But make sure that they adhere to the same persona as you have communicated to students and agree with them how long they should work on that (e.g. in your allocated week spend 2 x 30mins to follow up on comments). And of course this time should come from their paid time budget.

What do you do with the DB during open book exams?
If you are worried about your discussion board facilitating collaborations at times when you do not want to facilitate this, e.g. during exam times, you can chose to switch off or freeze (an option in Piazza) the DB.

Which DB Engine

There are two options discussed here, the Blackboard (BB) internal DB or an external discussion board by piazza.com.
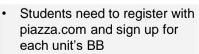
	PROS	CONS
BB	• Automatic tie in to BB • Students are automatically enrolled	• Limited functionality
Piazza	• Good Post labelling system • Easy linking between posts • You can directly link to specific posts • Student answers can be endorsed by teaching staff • Look and feel of email software • Different interface to BB • Can consider DB which cut across units (but stay in the same institution) • You can receive email notifications (adjustable settings) • You can administer online MC quizzes in DB • Important posts can easily be copied from one year to the next. • Student usage statistics are easily available	• Students need to register with piazza.com and sign up for each unit's BB • Different interface to BB • You receive email notifications

BB

Piazza

Resources

- BB help on discussion boards
- BB discussion board intro video
- Piazza homepage with help and videos
- Piazza intro video (in UoM context)
- Look inside a Piazza DB
- Further advice on running discussion boards is available from: Blackboard,

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